

# New Light on the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962

By Chalmers M. Roberts

## Former Hungarian Diplomat Here Reveals Some Intriguing Background

THE CUBAN missile crisis of 1962 never ceases to intrigue those who lived through it or had anything to do with it. And so two new works that add to the general knowledge are well worth reporting. One is a unique look at the crisis by a Communist diplomat then in Washington. The other is an analytical study by an associate professor at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard.

Janos Radvanyi was the Hungarian chargé in Washington at the time (there was no ambassador), an affable fellow with whom I had much contact. On May 17, 1967, he defected, turning up later at Stanford where he wrote "Hungary and the Super Powers" to be published in May by the Hoover Institution. The book is largely about Hungarian-American relations. But one chapter on the missile crisis will have far wider interest. What follows is from it.

IN SEPTEMBER and October, 1962, Radvanyi reported home that the United States was overreacting to reports of Soviet activity in Cuba. He did so in part because Soviet diplomats here had told him the uproar was part of the American pre-election campaign. But one day he received a copy of a cable to Budapest from Hungarian Ambassador Janos Beck in Havana. Beck "made it a point to discount information he had received from the Chinese embassy in Havana

as being provocatively anti-Soviet," Radvanyi writes. But "the Chinese ambassador had apparently told him that according to information he had received from private sources the Soviet Union was delivering surface-to-surface ballistic missiles to Cuba and that Soviet military advisers had come to Cuba not as instructors but as members of Soviet special rocket force units to operate these missiles."

Radvanyi goes on: "Ambassador Beck remarked that his Chinese friends had complained of Soviet unwillingness to disclose any details and had asked Beck whether he knew anything more about the whole affair. Beck argued that the story of the deployment of ground-to-ground missiles had been launched by 'American warmongers' and observed that neither the Soviet ambassador in Havana nor high-ranking Cuban officials had mentioned anything to him about the missile build-up."

This message apparently was sent in late July or early August. Soviet arms shipments were arriving at that time, though the first medium range missiles did not come until Sept. 8. On Aug. 22 CIA Director John McCone voiced to President Kennedy his suspi-

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Defense Department photograph of Soviet missile installations at San Cristobal, Cuba, Oct. 23, 1962.

isions that the Soviets were preparing to introduce offensive missiles, perhaps on the basis of information gathered in Cuba that month by French intelligence agent Philippe De Vesjoli. However, on Sept. 19 the United States Intelligence Board's estimate was that the Soviets would not introduce offensive missiles into Cuba. October would be another story.

On Oct. 18 Radvanyi attended the first of three meetings with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly F. Dobrynin and the heads of all the Communist embassies in Washington. Dobrynin discussed the meeting the previous day between President Kennedy and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. After dinner at the Czech embassy Dobrynin "assured his audience that recent reports of Soviet ground-to-ground missiles in Cuba were completely without foundation." As to the Kennedy-Gromyko meeting, "nothing extraordinary had happened"; the German situation had been discussed at length along with disarmament. At this point in his account, Radvanyi states that "it seems highly unlikely to me" that Gromyko had not been "pry to the Kremlin discussions" about the missiles but that "it is altogether possible that Dobrynin may not have been informed."

THE CRISIS became public with the President's Oct. 22 speech. Next day Dobrynin called the diplomats together again, explaining that the purpose was "to collect information and to solicit opinions on the Cuban situation." Dobrynin "characterized it as serious and offered two reasons for his concern. First of all, he foresaw a possible American attack on Cuba that would almost surely result in the death of some Soviet military personnel who had been sent to handle the sophisticated new weapons. Thus by implication the Soviet ambassador was admitting the presence in Cuba of Soviet medium-range missiles. Secondly, he feared that when Soviet ships reached the announced quarantine line a confrontation was inevitable." Dobrynin "explained that any defensive weapon could be labeled offensive as well and dismissed American concern ever a threat from Cuba. The Pearl Harbor attack, he suggested, might have been responsible for this unwarranted paranoia. Everybody agreed that the situation was serious and that the possibility of an American invasion of Cuba could not be discounted." Asked how Moscow intended to deal with the quarantine, "Dobrynin was forced again to reply that he simply had no information . . ."

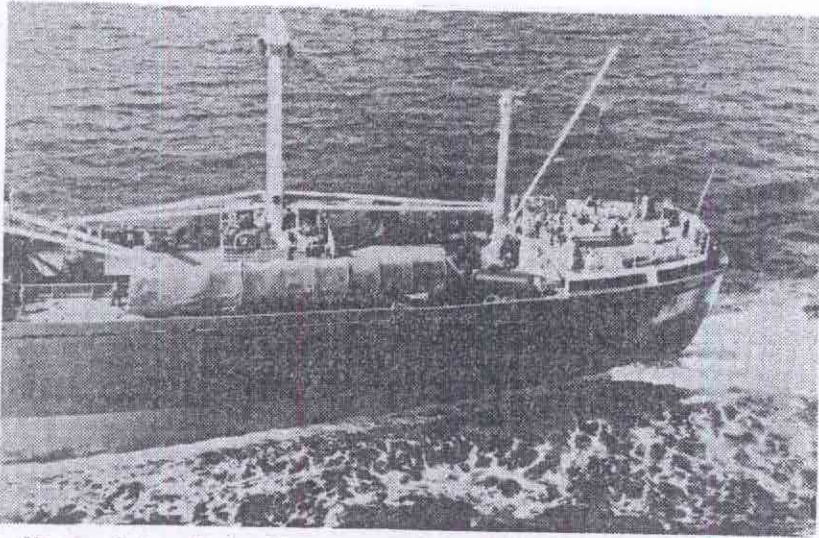
On Oct. 23 at the Soviet embassy's military attache party Dobrynin told Radvanyi "that the situation was even more confused and unstable . . ." But, as Radvanyi notes, the Soviet envoy did not disclose that before the party he had met with Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy in the third floor of the embassy. It was then that Robert Kennedy told Dobrynin the President knew he had been deceived by assurances from Dobrynin and others that no offensive missiles would be placed in Cuba, as detailed in Robert Kennedy's posthumously published "Thirteen Days."

At another gathering of the Commu-

nist diplomats on Oct. 26, this time at the Soviet embassy, they discussed Walter Lippmann's column of the previous day suggesting dismantling of American missiles in Turkey along with the Soviet missiles in Cuba. "The Soviet embassy," writes Radvanyi, "apparently considered the Lippmann article a trial balloon, launched by the U.S. administration to seek out a suitable solution. Dobrynin sought their (Communist diplomats') opinion as to whether they thought the Lippmann article should be regarded as an indirect suggestion on the part of the White House." Only the Romanian ambassador indicated he had some reason to think that it was just that; Lippmann, as far as I know, has never said whether the idea was simply his own. According to RFK's account, Adlai Stevenson on the 20th had suggested a swap involving withdrawal of American missiles from both Turkey and Italy and giving up the naval base at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. The President rejected the proposal.

AT the meeting on the 26th Dobrynin said he still had no information on how Moscow would meet the quarantine. "I told him," writes Radvanyi, "that according to my information the American buildup for an invasion of Cuba was nearly completed and that American missile bases had aimed all their missiles toward targets on the island. Only a go-ahead signal from the President was needed. The Soviet ambassador concurred with my analysis, adding that the Soviet Union found itself in a difficult position in Cuba because its supply lines were too long and the American blockade could be very effective. (Czechoslovak ambassador) Ruzek remarked grimly that if the Americans invaded, it would definitely trigger a nuclear war. At this point I lost self-control and asked whether it was not the same to die from an American missile attack as from a Soviet one. Dobrynin attempted to assure me that the situation had not reached such proportions and that a solution would no doubt be found . . ."

"At the close of the meeting, any last remaining ray of hope I may have had for a peaceful solution was abruptly shattered. Dobrynin now announced that the Soviet



Close-up photograph of a Soviet ship leaving Cuba on Nov. 6 with canvas-covered missiles on the after deck.

embassy was this very moment burning its archives. Shocked at this news I inquired of Dobrynin whether he planned to evacuate the families of Soviet diplomatic personnel. Dobrynin replied in the negative.

"Back once again at the Hungarian legation I rushed off to Budapest a long summary of my latest meeting with Dobrynin, and informed the foreign ministry that Dobrynin had confirmed the information that the Americans were militarily prepared to invade Cuba. I emphasized that unless a quick political solution were found within the next few days, the United States would proceed with the invasion and nothing short of a miracle could save the world from nuclear war.

"Within two hours I received a troubled inquiry from Budapest asking whether I could possibly be aware of the implications of my words. I insisted that I would take full responsibility for every word in my report."

On the 27th Soviet Premier Khrushchev offered to swap missiles in Cuba for missiles in Turkey but the next day he accepted the Kennedy demand for outright removal of both missiles and planes from Cuba.

Fidel Castro was outraged and Moscow sent Anastas Mikoyan to Cuba to reason with him. After three weeks there Mikoyan stopped in Washington en route home and Dobrynin invited the Communist diplomats to dinner with him on Nov. 30. Mikoyan explained how he had tried to win Castro's approval to the United Nations inspection of the missile dismantling process in Cuba, one of the President's terms to which Khrushchev had agreed, but which Castro rejected. According to Mikoyan's account, he was the one who "proposed to Moscow instead that the Americans observe the evacuation of the missiles from the air and, if necessary, might inspect Soviet ships on the high seas." They were inspected from the air, the tarpulins covering them pulled back by the Soviet sailors on ships taking them home.

"After dinner," recounts Radvanyi, "Mikoyan continued his briefing by explaining that the Cuban situation had been complicated by the continual advice which Castro had received from the Chinese. Peking, ac-

ording to Mikoyan, had sent tons of propaganda material, and Mao Tse-tung had transmitted to Havana one message after another assuring the Cubans that the eight hundred million Chinese stood firmly behind them and that the Americans were paper tigers. Mikoyan reported that while the Chinese had done nothing to help defend Castro, they had refrained from shelling Quemoy and Matsu during the days of the crisis. Mikoyan noted ironically that they might easily have stepped up pressure against Taiwan which—with the Americans involved in the Caribbean—could have changed the whole situation . . ."

In defense against the Peking charges, hurled by now at Moscow, of "adventurism" in deploying the missiles and "capitulationism" for taking them out, "Mikoyan offered two explanations for the Soviet action. The missile deployment in the Caribbean, he said, was aimed at defending Castro on the one hand and, on the other, at achieving a definite shift in the power relationship between the socialist and the capitalist worlds. After evaluating the strong American reaction during the crisis, however, the President had decided against risking the security of the Soviet Union and its allies for the sake of Cuba."

This account squares with Khrushchev's in "Khrushchev Remembers." There the Soviet leader contended that while the "main thing" was to defend Cuba, "in addition" "our missiles would have equalized what the West likes to call the 'balance of power.'"

IN THE second book, "Essence of Decision" by Graham T. Allison, published by Little-Brown, an exhaustive study of the Cuban crisis relying on published material, the author accepts as "the most satisfactory explanation" of the Soviet move the effort to end the Soviet "missile gap" then existing. The missiles in Cuba "amounted to a doubling of Soviet first-strike capabilities."

Two other points made by Allison struck me. He concludes that the American warnings against installation of the missiles may not have seemed all that strong to Moscow and hence the Soviets went on. He notes that on Oct. 14 McGeorge Bundy, Mr Kennedy's assistant for national security, said publicly

that he knew there was "no present evidence, and I think there is no present likelihood" of "a major offensive capability" being installed in Cuba. Yet on Sept. 28 the United States had taken pictures that Bundy knew about of crates on the decks of Soviet ships in route to Cuba crates similar to those used to send IL-28 light bombers to Egypt and Indonesia. So Allison says that "the conclusion that the administration had discovered a way to tolerate one type of offensive weapon in Cuba is unavoidable."

Second, Allison concludes from Robert Kennedy's account, published in 1969, that what he told Dobrynin just before Khrushchev agreed to pull out the missiles amounted to offering a private deal: to do secretly what the President refused to do publicly, pull American missiles out of Turkey in exchange for Soviet missiles out of Cuba. In RFK's account he said he told Dobrynin that "there could be no quid pro quo or any arrangement made under this kind of threat or pressure" but that he also told Dobrynin that "President Kennedy had been anxious to remove those missiles from Turkey and Italy for a long period of time. He had ordered their removal some time ago, and it was our judgment that, within a short time after the crisis was over, those missiles would be gone." After the crisis abated they were withdrawn.

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